

Verbal Abuse and Students' Social Relationship in Uyo Urban of Akwa Ibom State: Implications for Family Counselling

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of verbal abuse and students' social relationship in Uyo Urban of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The correlational survey design was used for the study. The population of this study consists of all 1380 (one thousand, three hundred and eighty) SS2 students in the five public secondary schools in Uyo Urban. The sample size for this study consisted of 238 of Senior Secondary Two Students selected from all the five secondary school students in Uyo Urban. The sampling technique used in this study was multi-stage sampling technique. The researcher-designed instruments titled "Verbal Abuse and Social relationship Questionnaire (CASAQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was duly validated by three experts to ensure language appropriateness, clarity, adequacy of the items, and the suitability of the instrument based on the research objectives. The reliability coefficients of .80 and .81 were realized for Verbal abuse Questionnaire and Social relationship Questionnaire respectively. The researcher administered the instruments personally to the respondents at the different schools within the study area. The data were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). All the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that verbal abuse significant relate with students' interaction with peers, moral behaviour of students and students' participation in school debates. The findings imply that school counsellors need to approach parents or caregivers of affected students and counsel them accordingly. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that parents and guardians should endeavour to stop verbal abuse of any child to ensure the development of positive self-concept towards social relationship.

Keywords: abuse, family, verbal, relationship, social, counselling,

Introduction

The traditional African Society has always placed a great premium on children. Children bring joy to parents, grandparents, other extended family members and even to the whole community. Families perform rituals and sacrifices to their ancestors and gods, so that they would be blessed with more children because they have the belief that children ensure the continuity of the lineage and the community (Idang, 2015). In family life, parents in all cultures naturally, love and care for their offspring. Naturally one expects occasional parent–

child conflicts in the family but when a rusty relationship is allowed to degenerate into an abuse, then there is much to worry about. In some homes, parent-child relationship is a source of distress and trauma. A child is abused if a recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caregiver leads to physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or any act or failure to act which involves imminent risk of serious harm (Theoklitou, Kabitsis and Kabitsi, 2012).

Child abuse refers simply to the maltreatment of the child. In some countries, it is the consequences like the causing of injury that makes an act of refusal to act an abuse (Allen, 2011). Child abuse for some scholars is simply seen as maltreatment by a parent or caregiver. In that case, maltreatment of the child by adults other than parents or caregiver may be regarded as an assault. Any form of child abuse is detrimental to the overall development of the child. The effect may vary in degree or the seriousness of the problems, and the difficulties it causes depending on such factors as age of the abused child; the duration of the abuse; the abusive person; the ability of the abused child to share his experiences; the abused child's social environment; whether the abuse involves physical injury, humiliation or violence and/or the cultural context of the abuse.

There are many facets of child abuse. These include physical abuse, verbal abuse, social neglect, child labour, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. Each of these abuses has negative effect on the child. Verbal abuse is a form of child abuse in which the abuser uses words, cues and signs to communicate offensive words on the child. As stated by Aluede, Ojugo, and Okoza (2012) verbal abuse of a child could result in fear and [anxiety](#), [depression](#), stress and poor social relationship at home and in school. Allen (2011) also opined that abused children have intrusive memories, memory gap disorders, sleep or eating problems, hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startle responses, irritability, anger issues, alcohol and drug abuse, [suicide](#), [self-harm](#), and assaultive behaviors.

Verbal abuse is strongly associated with chronic pain, migraine and frequent headaches, stammering, ulcers, spastic colon, and frequent indigestion, diarrhea, or constipation along with many stress-related heart conditions. A verbally abused child may arm herself against the pain, which only lessens her already impaired ability to manage negative emotion and self-soothe. Babies learn to self-regulate and comfort themselves through attuned [parenting](#), but the verbally abusive parent is completely unattuned. A child under the care of an abusive parent may be constantly flooded with feelings which further limit the growth of his or her [emotional intelligence](#), a skill set built on identifying emotions and processing them. In the wake of continued verbal aggression, it is hard for a child to sort out whether he or she is feeling afraid, shamed, hurt, or angry.

Poleari, Rabi, Bolger and Teicher (2014) maintained that the effects of verbal abuse on children ages 18 and under include; substance abuse (more prevalent in males), physical aggression, delinquency, and social problems. The author further stated that the more verbally aggressive the parent, the more pronounced the problem, and the relationship between these problems and verbal aggression does not depend on the child's age, sex, or

economic status. Parents, who tell their children that they are dumb, bad and so on, raise children who think they are dumb or bad and act as such.

Social relationship is an ability of one to withstand challenges, learn to interact with his environment, develop good moral standards and conscience as well as learn to deal appropriately with anxiety and conflict within the school setting. In effect, social relationship incorporates such components as ability to interact with others, ability to participate in social activities, as well as conforming to social norms. Social integration involves the student “fitting in” to the social community of the informal environment to the institution. Adigeb and Mbua (2015) are of the view that academic failure can be caused by unsuccessful social integration. The author noted further that “Institutional Isolation” is a result of students not connecting in the social environment and not gaining membership into the campus community, while Kitishat and Hana’ Mahmoud (2015) found that successful social relationship indirectly contributes to a higher grade point average as good social relationship involves the students engaging in campus activities in and out of the classroom.

Social relationship determines students’ success in coping with interpersonal demands, social skills and ability to meet people and make friends (Estrada, 2006). For Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro and Lovett (2010), students’ school activities serve as a coping mechanism for making new friends and finding their place in the community. Social relationship is a continuous process by which a person varies his or her behaviour to produce a more harmonious relationship between himself/herself and his/her environment. It implies changes in our thinking and way of life to the demands of the situation. The important components of adjustment to college or university considered in this study include students’ academic, social and emotional adjustment as well as institutional attachment. Social relationship includes the students’ involvement in social activities and satisfaction with various aspects of college experience, emotional problems, including manifestation of depressive symptoms. Institutional attachment describes a student’s satisfaction with the university experience in general and with the institution he or she is attending in particular.

Verbal abuse could result in emotional disturbances of the child. Emotionally disturbed children usually display antisocial behaviours which are individually or collectively executed. They are most often isolated from groups and group action because their own internalised conflicts and acting out behaviour often work against societal laws and dynamics. Emotionally neglected children are often molded from a history of emotional neglect and abuse covering a couple of generation. They are characterized by built up frustration, anger, hostility, inner conflicts, tension and the inability to control anxiety and behaviour (Gadit, 2011).

Idrisi (2016) observed that the antisocial behaviour is therefore often unpredictable and triggered by relatively remote or minor incidents in a prevailing situation. For instance, children are abused for not doing well in their academic, followed with a tirade of verbal abuse. The behaviour is injurious to themselves and to others. The foundations for good mental health are laid down in the emotional development that occurs in infancy and later

childhood and appears to be dependent upon the quality and frequency of response to an infant or child from a parent or primary caregiver (Poleari, *et al.* 2014). The parental response to the infant's emotions or expressive behaviour usually results in the formation of an attachment bond between the two. This bond develops in an early mothers and years of life, and is closely linked to the behavioural response of the parent and the ongoing cycle of parent-child interaction.

Children's interaction with peers in school is very important to the well-being of a child. Unfortunately, most children find it difficult to interact with classmates and friends in school. Maintaining positive social interactions with peers and adults, having good social skills such as empathy, assistance and listening among others and controlling impulses (self-control) are all linked to achievement (Hutchinson & Mueller, 2008). The ability of students to control their behaviour and impulses is associated with higher scores in school subjects and this performance is recognized as a determinant of educational persistence (Fareo, 2019).

According to Poleari, *et al.* (2014) children who are labeled as stupid and never-do-well by their parents or teachers are less likely to interact with other people believing and seeing themselves as labeled by the adult. Poleari, *et al.* (2014) further stated that the effects of verbal abuse and emotional abuse intertwine because [verbally abusive statements](#) play on the victim's emotions. For example, the simple statement, "You're just looking for a fight!" tells the victim what he's doing and thinking, accuses the victim of attacking the abuser, and diverts the topic to a new problem (avoiding a fight). Emotionally, the victim feels misunderstood, unimportant, and afraid of what may happen if he presses the issue. Is this how we want our loved ones to feel?

A more worrisome aspect of verbal abuse is calling of names. Thousands of children are daily verbally abused in Nigeria as it the case in other countries. Indeed, verbal abuse is one of the worst kinds of "verbal-based violence" directed to children globally (Noh, 2012). Though it is difficult to ascertain the true prevalence of verbal abuse due to the controversy over meaning, and people's inability to recall accurately at adulthood what happened to them in childhood, evidence abound that many children are verbally abused daily. Verbal abuse is not limited hate speech by teachers or outsiders only. It takes the form of routine disgrace and derogatory words against the child both in the presence of other people or alone. Verbal abuse of the child is a world-wide phenomenon and it makes a child to coil into his shell. Hutchinson and Mueller (2008) reiterated that majority of children are daily abused verbally by the adults or people older than them daily.

According to Aluede, Ojugo and Okoza (2012) verbally abused children are often shy. Verbally disturbed children usually display antisocial behaviours which are individually or collectively executed. They are most often isolated from groups and group action because their own internalised conflicts and acting out behaviour often work against societal laws and dynamics. Emotionally neglected children are often molded from a history of emotional neglect and abuse covering a couple of generation. They are characterised by built up

frustration, anger, hostility, inner conflicts, tension and the inability to control anxiety and behaviour (Hutchinson & Mueller, 2008).

Noh (2012) observed that the antisocial behaviour is therefore often unpredictable and triggered by relatively remote or minor incidents in a prevailing situation. For instance, youth from oil producing area is beaten for requesting for jobs, followed with a tirade of verbal abuse. The behaviour is injurious to themselves and to others. The exasperate leaders and authorities with repetitions of unapproved behaviour in militancy. The psychological effects of verbal abuse include: fear and [anxiety](#), [depression](#), stress and intrusive memories, memory gap disorders, sleep or eating problems, hyper-vigilance and exaggerated startle responses, irritability, anger issues, alcohol and drug abuse, [suicide](#), [self-harm](#), and assaultive behaviors (Brassard and Hart, 2007).

Noh (2012) observed that, parents who are abusers produces children and youths who may disobey their parents due to an unduly strict level of discipline. That these type of children may refuse to accept parental guidance and prefer their friends. This may make the child to be subjected to further punishment from parents, which can lead to the development of fear, maladjustment, and traumatic atmosphere, which could result in the development of a negative academic self-concept. Noh (2012) also added that learners who perceives their parents as autocratic demonstrated a more externally locus of control. In the same vein, overprotective child rearing style in mothers was related to an external locus of control and a negative self-image. This might be expected since protective mothers allow fewer opportunities for the youth to engage in self-initiated activities.

According to Thomason (2018) the effects of verbal abuse on children ages 18 and under include substance abuse (more prevalent in males)⁴, physical aggression, delinquency, and social problems. The more verbally aggressive the parent, the more pronounced the problem, and the relationship between these problems and verbal aggression does not depend on the child's age, sex, or economic status. Parents, who tell their children that they are dumb, bad, etc., raise children who think they are dumb or bad and act as such.

Childhood is a period of life during which individuals start to develop their personality and refine their interests. Young people are susceptible to negative influences as well as to the models and images around them (Hutchinson and Mueller, 2008). Therefore, having significant adults who are motivated to develop positive self-concept may determine the attitude of an individual education. Lifestyle is fundamental to personal/social development, health, and academic success. Students who take part in school debates generally have a better attention span in school and exhibit better cognitive performance, sedentary behaviour may interfere with learning and academic success. In a school where students, especially low-achieving students are verbally labeled they may choose to exempt themselves from taking part in school activities such as debate (Adigeb and Mbua, 2015). According to Thomason (2018) children who have been verbally abused by their significant adults such as older siblings, parents and teachers hardly take part in competitive activities such as debates.

Verrill(2018) conducted a study on the relationship between childhood abuse and aggressive behavior in adulthood. A correlational research was employed in the course of the study. Questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection and data collected were analysed using simple linear regression. The finding of the study revealed that Emotional abuse in childhood related the most to intimate partner violence in men and physical abuse was the most related to relationship violence in women, but emotional, sexual, and physical abuse were all associated with violence in dating relationships. The research findings on childhood abuse and adult aggression can help individuals establish methods to inhibit aggressive behaviors and protect abused children, however more research on childhood maltreatment and aggression in female inmates and a variety of ethnic groups is required.

In another study Adigeb and Mbua (2015) investigated child abuse as it affects the academic performance of students in Boki LGA of Cross River State 200 respondents randomly selected for the study using simple random sampling technique. The questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. Test re-test reliability of the instrument was established, while Pearson product moment correlation analysis was the statistical technique considered appropriate. The critical level of .05 was used to test each hypothesis. The result of the analysis revealed that child physical abuse and sexual abuse were statistically related to students' academic performance. Based on the findings recommendations were made on the need to affectionate and intensified campaigns for awareness creation on the menace of child abuse – physical and sexual abuse as they deaden the future of the child.

Statement of the Problem

The most known and acknowledge abuses among children are physical, sexual and psychological. Not much have been said about verbal abuse because people and even the law maintain that words of mouth does not constitute crime but in many cases verbal abuse could result in suicidal action by a child. It is common these days to see children being verbally abused in one way or the other. This is carried out by parents, relatives, teachers and guardians of the children. Verbal abuse of children may take any form such as verbal abuse of physical structure, food, abuse of their parents, academic failure, being dirty and smelly, accusation of being a witch/wizard, labeling and so on. One cannot expect a bright tomorrow because children who are abused today will in their own turn, abuse their children or wards. The effects of abuse on any child are unbearable. Most of these verbally abuse children lose their self-concept, view themselves based on the label tagged on them. With all these, one is bound to ask what really is the problem. Can verbal abuse lead to social relationship problems in Uyo Urban of Akwa Ibom State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between verbal abuse and children's social relationship in Uyo Urban of Akwa Ibom State. Specifically stated, the objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate the relationship between verbal abuse and children's ability to interact with peers in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.
2. To investigate the relationship between verbal abuse and children's moral behaviour in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.
3. To determine the relationship between verbal abuse and children's participation in school debates in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses gave direction to the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between verbal abuse and children's ability to interact with peers in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.
2. There is no significant relationship verbal abuse and children's moral behaviour in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.
3. There is no significant relationship verbal abuse and children's participation in school debates in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.

Methodology

The correlational survey research design was used for the study. This correlational survey design was adopted since the study is to determine and establish the relationship between verbal abuse and social relationship problems of secondary school students in Uyo Urban. The population of this study consists of all 1380 (one thousand, three hundred and eighty) students. This consist of senior secondary two (SSII) students from all the five secondary school students in Uyo Urban for 2018-2019) academic year. The sample size for this study consisted of 238 of Senior Secondary Two (SS2) students from the study area. The sampling technique used in this study was multi-stage sampling technique were five schools in urban were purposively selected thereafter, students were selected from each of the school using simple random sampling technique. The researcher-designed instruments titled "Verbal Abuse and Social relationship Questionnaire (CASAQ) was used for data collection. The respondents were instructed to tick the level of their agreement or disagreement whether they; Strong Agree (SA), Agree(A); Disagree (D); Strongly Disagree(SD).

The instrument was duly validated by three experts to ensure language appropriateness, clarity, adequacy of the items, and the suitability of the instrument based on the research objectives. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instruments, the instruments were trial-tested on thirty (30) SS2 students who were not part of the main study but were found to be equivalent in all respect to the respondents in the main study. The researcher employed Cronbach Alpha Reliability Method to analyze the data generated from the trial-tested group and to determine the reliability of the instruments. The reliability coefficients of .80 and .81 were realized for Verbal Abuse Questionnaire and Social relationship Questionnaire respectively. The researcher administered the instrument personally to the respondents at the different schools within the study area. The data were analyzed using

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). All the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

Result

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between verbal abuse and children's ability to interact with peers in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Verbal Abuse and Interaction with Peers *N= 238*

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value	r-cri
Verbal Abuse(X)	61525	2750233	779848	0.70*	.196
Ability to Interact with Peers (Y)	17484	226026			

* Significant; *df = 236; p = 0.05; critical r-value = .196*

Data analysis in Table 1 indicates a calculated r-value of .70 which is found to be greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 when compared at .05 level of significance and 236 degree of freedom. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value then the null hypothesis which stated that verbal abuse has no significant relationship with children's interaction with peers is rejected. This implies that child labour has a significant relationship with children's interaction with peers.

Hypothesis 2. There is no significant relationship between verbal abuse and children's moral behaviour in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Moral Behaviour *N= 238*

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value	r-cri
Verbal Abuse (Y)	61525	2750233	936655	0.250*	.196
Moral Behaviour(X)	20995	322625			

* Significant; *df = 236; p = 0.05; critical r-value = .196*

The result of the analysis on verbal abuse and moral behaviour as presented in Table 2 shows a calculated r-value of 0.250, which is found to be greater than the critical r-value of .196 at .05 significance level and 236 degree of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This means that verbal abuse

has a significant relationship with social relationship problems such as moral behaviour of students.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between verbal abuse and children's participation in school debates in secondary schools in Uyo Urban.

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of Verbal abuse and Children's Participation in School Debates *N= 238*

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value	r-cri
Verbal Abuse (Y)	61525	2750233			
			840367	0.270*	.196
Participation in School Debates (X)	18838	260254			

* *Significant; df= 236; p = 0.05; critical r-value = .270*

Data entries as presented in Table 3 indicate a calculated r-value of .270 and a critical r-value of .196. The calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value at .05 level of significance and 236 degree of freedom. The null hypothesis, which stated that verbal abuse, has no significant relationship with social relationship such as participation in school debates stands rejected. The result implies that verbal abuse is significantly related to students' participation in school debates.

Discussion of Findings

The major aim of this study was to establish the relationship between verbal abuse and social relationship problems of secondary school students in Uyo Urban. The generated data were carefully processed and analysed. Consequently, the results revealed the following:

The findings of this study revealed that verbal abuse a significant relationship with students' interaction with peers. This finding inferred that children who are exposed to verbal abuse are likely to have difficulties in socialising at home and outside. This finding is in agreement with the opinion of Polari, et al., (2014) who viewed verbal abuse as a disinvestment in human resources formation. This, they said is as a result of the detrimental effect of verbal abuse on the individual child. Their explanation was based on the fact that, child labourers are deprived of freedom, fun, play and natural development.

The finding on hypothesis two revealed that verbal abuse of has a significant relationship with moral behaviour of students. This finding is in line with the finding of Noh (2012) who observed that the antisocial behaviour is therefore often unpredictable and triggered by relatively remote or minor incidents in a prevailing situation. For instance, youth from oil producing area is beaten for requesting for jobs, followed with a tirade of

verbal abuse. The behaviour is injurious to themselves and to others. The exasperate leaders and authorities with repetitions of unapproved behaviour in militancy.

The finding on hypothesis three also revealed that verbal abuse has a significant relationship with students' participation in school debates. The result implies that verbal abuse is significantly related to social relationship problems. This finding is in agreement with the Thomason (2018) who maintained that children who have been verbally abused by their significant adults such as older siblings, parents and teachers hardly take part in competitive activities such as debates.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that verbal abuse has significant relationship with social relationship problems among senior science students in Akwa Ibom State. Verbal abuse leads to deficiency in social skills which causes problems of social relationship among students in secondary school students in Uyo Urban. Poor social skills exacerbate anxiety and social maladjustment which impede stability and general congruence in life

Implications for Family Counselling

The findings of this study have various implications. For instance, a finding on the significant influence of verbal abuse on students' inability to interact with peers implies that most children who find it difficult to interact with other students even at the senior secondary level has been verbally abused by family members. The school counsellors need to approach parents or caregivers of those students and counsel them accordingly. The findings on the influence of verbal abuse on moral behaviour among students inferred that school counsellors have a lot to do in counselling not only the students but their family members and caregivers. The school counsellors have duties to do by observing and interacting with those students who exhibit immoral and antisocial behaviours.

The findings on the influence of verbal abuse on students' participation in school debates implies that students who are abused by adults view themselves based on the label tagged on them by the abusers. The school counsellors therefore need to check those students who do not like to participate in school co-curricular activities and examine them through counselling to ensure they come out of their shell.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study which has established the relationship between verbal abuse and social relationship problems of secondary school students in Uyo Urban, the following recommendations are made to ameliorate the situation for acceptable personality development:

1. Parents and guardians should endeavour to stop verbal abuse of any child to ensure the development of positive self-concept towards social relationship.

2. There should be enlightenment programmes by the government, the school, church and non-governmental organisations to educate the people on the dangers of verbal abuse on the child.
3. The school authority should make the school to generate love and students-friendly programmes and not to antagonise, abuse, neglect and condemn the students. Where there is no love at home, the students should find it at school.

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